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SUBJECT: GOCI LAUNCHES REMEDIATION PROGRAM TO COMBAT CHILD  
LABOR IN THE COCOA SECTOR

REF: ABIDJAN 435

1.(U) Summary: The Ivorian government launched its new remediation program on July 22 in a ceremony that also commemorated World Day Against Child Labor. The program will target 31 cocoa-growing villages and is intended to help change traditional practices by ensuring that each village has a primary school, health clinic, and income generating activities to supplement the income from cocoa. The Minister for Civil Service and Labor announced that the government is revising existing laws to strengthen the provisions dealing with the worst forms of child labor and increase to 20 years in prison the penalty that can be given to violators of the law. End Summary

12. (U) Ambassador attended the GOCI's July 22 ceremony in honor of World Child Labor Day at which a recently announced remediation program (see ref A) designed to reduce child labor in the cocoa sector was also launched. A brochure distributed to attendees describes the remediation program as consisting of 1) programs to sensitize parents to the dangers associated with child labor and immediately end the involvement of children in dangerous chores; 2) sensitization of parents to the importance of education and sending children to school; 3) supporting parents in the effort to change traditional practices by providing schools, clinics and income generating activities to supplement their income from cocoa.

13. (U) Held under the auspices of the Prime Minister, the ceremony was notable for the clear and repetitive message delivered by government officials to the local population: children must go to school and cannot be allowed to do certain kinds of work. Speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister, Minister of Family and Social Affairs Jeanne Peuhmond reiterated the government's opposition to the misuse of children for strenuous work, and reaffirmed the government's determination to eradicate this phenomenon. She told parents that the appropriate place for their children is in school, not in the fields, and urged them to give their children - especially girls - a chance to learn and succeed in life. Hubert Oulaye, the Minister for Civil Service and Labor hit the same themes and named all 31 villages that will benefit from the government's remediation program. He acknowledged that a weak legal framework in Cote d'Ivoire had contributed to the abuse of an outdated and wholly insufficient labor code, and said the government was in the process of revising appropriate laws to outlaw the worst forms of child labor and increase the penalty for violation of this law to up to 20 years in jail. Mme. Peuhmond reiterated this intent in her remarks. Oulaye admitted, however, that even with a change in the law, Cote d'Ivoire will be hard pressed to reach the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labor by 2016. He called on all concerned (including interested donors) to contribute fully to the effort.

14. (U) The ceremony was held in Adoua village in the Aboisso region, one of the oldest cocoa-growing areas in the country.

The prefect, who also heads the village committee to combat child labor, stated in his remarks that the villagers had contributed to the dismantling of several trafficking networks, repatriated 13 minor children (with help from German aid agency GTZ); returned 38 Ivorian children to their families, and documented 124 additional minor children as regular workers. This was the result of numerous public sensitization programs and seminars. The prefect joked about the fact that he had been successful despite never having learned to speak French properly because he spent his childhood working in the cocoa fields -- but he called on parents to accept that the world had changed.

15. (U) Comment: The ceremony was an impressive one in that the government's message was clear and was delivered in a manner that came across as both genuine and serious. Post will seek to obtain the revised law that the Ministers referred to and will keep Department posted on any major developments on this front.

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